

November 5, 2006

Jane Hodgson, 91, Supporter of Abortion Rights, Is Dead

By [MARGALIT FOX](#)



Steve Weit
Jane Hodgson in 1989.

Jane Hodgson, a prominent [abortion](#) rights advocate who in a highly publicized test case in 1970 became the only doctor in the United States to be convicted of illegally performing an abortion in a hospital, died on Oct. 23 at her home in Rochester, Minn. She was 91.

Dr. Hodgson's death was confirmed by her family.

Until January 1973, when the Supreme Court handed down its landmark decision in *Roe v. Wade*, abortion was illegal in most states. Among them was [Minnesota](#), where Dr. Hodgson had a busy practice as an obstetrician and gynecologist.

In April 1970, Dr. Hodgson agreed to perform an abortion in order to challenge Minnesota law. At the time, abortion was permitted in the state only to save the woman's life.

The patient, a married mother of three, had contracted [German measles](#) early in her fourth [pregnancy](#). Though the woman's life was not in danger, the disease carried a high risk for birth defects. Dr. Hodgson performed the abortion and was arrested shortly afterward. Convicted in November 1970, she was sentenced to 30 days in jail and a year's probation.

Dr. Hodgson's sentence was suspended pending appeal; after the *Roe* decision, her conviction was overturned. She served no jail time.

In later years, Dr. Hodgson remained a public champion of abortion rights, speaking widely on the subject and founding several reproductive health care clinics. She also lent her name to several abortion-related lawsuits, notably *Hodgson v. Minnesota*, which challenged a state law requiring both parents to be notified before a minor could have an abortion.

Ruling in the case in 1990, the [United States Supreme Court](#) upheld the Minnesota law with a 5-to-4 vote, finding it constitutional because of its provision allowing patients to seek permission from a judge instead of from their parents.

There was little in Dr. Hodgson's background that would mark her as a crusader. For the first decades of her career, she refused to perform abortions, though a steady stream of patients begged her to in whispers. But, as she said later in interviews, she grew increasingly troubled by watching women come to her with complications from botched abortions obtained elsewhere.

Jane Elizabeth Hodgson was born on Jan. 23, 1915, in Crookston, Minn. Her father was a country doctor, and she often accompanied him on rounds. She earned a bachelor's degree in chemistry from Carleton College in 1934 and an M.D. from the [University of Minnesota](#) in 1939. After advanced training at the [Mayo Clinic](#), she established her practice in St. Paul.

In 1940, Dr. Hodgson married Frank Quattlebaum, a vascular surgeon; he died in 2004. She is survived by their two daughters, Gretchen Banks of Edina, Minn., and Nancy Burke of Golden Valley, Minn.; and three grandchildren.

When she was well into her 70's, Dr. Hodgson continued to make the 150-mile weekly trip from St. Paul to Duluth, Minn., to perform abortions at a clinic she had helped establish there.

"I think in many ways I've been lucky to have been part of this," Dr. Hodgson said in the book "Doctors of Conscience" (Beacon Press, 1995) by Carole Joffe. "If I hadn't gotten involved, I would have gone through life probably being perfectly satisfied to go to the medical society parties and it would have been very, very dull. I would have been bored silly."